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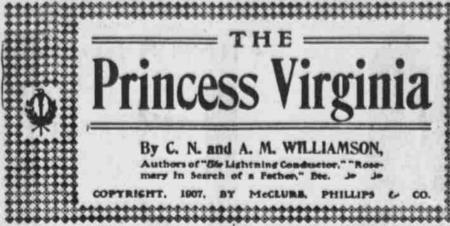
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[CONTINUED.]

"I don't understand," she faltered. You are the emperor, and I am no more than"-

"You are my wife if you love me." In the shock of her ecstatic surprise she was helpless to resist him longer. and he held her close and passionately, his lips on her hair, her face crushed against his heart. She could hear it beating, feel it throb under her cheek. His wife? Then he loved her enough

for that. Yet how was it possible for him to stand ready for her sake to override the laws of his own land?

"My darling-my wife!" he said again. "To think that you love me!" "I have loved you from the first," the princess confessed, "but I was afraid you would feel, even if you cared, that we must say goodby. Now"- And in an instant the whole truth would have been out, but the word "goodby" stabbed him, and he could not let it pass.

"We shall not say goodby, not for an hour," he cried. "After this I could not lose you. There's nothing to prevent my being your husband, you my wife. Would to God you were of royal blood and you should be my empress-the fairest empress that poet or historian ever saw-but we're prisoners of fate, you and I. We must take the goods the gods provide. My goddess you will always be, but the empress of Rhaetia even my love isn't powerful enough to make you. If I am to you only half what you are to me you'll be satisfied with the empire of my heart."

Suddenly the warm blood of Virginia's veins grew chill. It was as if a wind had blown up from the dark depths of the lake to strike like lce into her soul. An instant more and he would have known that she was a princess of the blood, and through his whole life she could have gone on worshiping him because he had been ready to break down all barriers for her love before he guessed there need be none to break. Now her warm im-pulse of gratitude was frozen by the biting blast of disillusionment, but still there was hope left. It might be that she misunderstood him. She would not judge him yet.

"The empire of your heart!" she echoed. "If that were mine I should be richer than with all the treasures of the earth. If you were Leo, the chamois hunter, I would love you as I love you now, because in yourself you are the one man for me, and I'd go with you to the end of the world as

fering.' Still I had no thought of the future without a parting. I felt that inevitable. And the suffering came hand in hand with the joy, for not a night here at Lyndalberg have I slept. If I had been weak I should have groaned aloud in the agony of renunciation. "My rooms open on a lawn. More than once I've come out into the darkness when all the household was sleeping. Sometimes I have walked to this



"Nover !" she exclaimed.

very spot where you and I stand now -heart to heart for the first time, my darling-asking myself whether there were any way out of labyrinth. It was not until I brought you here and saw you by my side, with the moon rays for a crown, that a flash of blinding light seemed to pierce the clouds. Suddenly I saw all things clearly, and, though there will be difficulties, I count them as overcome."

"Still you haven't answered my question," said Virginia in a low, strained voice.

"I'm coming to that now. It was best that you should know first all that's been troubling my heart and brain during these few bittersweet days which have taught me so much. You know men who have their place at the head of great nations can't think first of themselves or even of those they love better than themselves. If they hope to snatch at personal happl. nees they must take the one way open to them and be thankful.

"Don't do me the horrible injustice believe that I wouldn't be proud to

"An insult? No, a thousand times no.

I see that even now you don't under-

"I think that I understand very well,

she had watched as it grew lay shat-

tered, destroyed, in the moment which

"I tell you that you cannot under-

stand or you wouldn't say-you

wouldn't dare to say, my love-that I'd

insulted you. Don't you see, don't you

stood still, his lips tight, his shoulders braced, as if he held his breast open for the knife.

"By heaven, it is you who are cruel!" he said at last. "How can I make you see your injustice?"

"In no way. There's nothing more to be said between us two after this

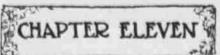
except goodby." "It shall not be goodby."

"It must. I wish it."

He had caught her dress as she turn-

ed to go, but now he released her. 'You wish it? It's not true that you love me, then?" Everything-every-"It was true. thing in my whole life-is changed from this hour. It would be better

if I'd never seen you, Goodby,"



HE ran from him along the moonlit path. One step he took as if to but checked himself-

there was more of pain than anger, though never before in all his life perhaps had he been thwarted in any strong desire. Passion urged him forfever heat.

For this girl's sake he had in a few above the frailties of common men, the she changed her mind. ambition to be placed and worthly Helen Mowbray.

perience what love can mean, what madness is on them, he would have been utterly unable to understand the Captain von Breitstein. state of mind.

A cousin inclined to act as he was ago have found all the emperor's infludown every obstacle that rose in his tion. way, if only the girl had seen things with his eyes.

to make her morganatically his wife let loose the first that sprang to his he must give great cause for com- lips.

would write a letter and send it to her room. But, no; perhaps it would be wise to give her a longer interval for reflection and, it might be, regret. Tomorrow he would see her and show all the depths of that great love which she had thought to throw away. She could not go on withstanding him forever, and, now that he had burned his boats behind him, he would never think of turning back. He would persevere till she should yield.

back came whispering in his car. He

Meanwhile Virginia had hurried blindly toward the house, and it was instinct rather than intention that led her to the open window of the music room, by which she had come out,

Tears burned her eyellds, but they did not fall until she stood once more in the room where she and Leopold had been happy together. There she had sat at the plano, and he had bent over her, love in his eyes-honest love. she had thought, her heart full of thanksgiving. How little she had

guessed then the humiliation in store for her and the end of all her hopes! How could she bear her pain, and how follow and keep her, could she go on living out her life? She paused in the window niche,

and let her go. Only looking into the room through a mist his eyes went with her, and in them of tears, and a sob choked her. "Cruel, cruel!" she whispered. "What agony, what an insult ""

Then, dashing away her tears, she pushed back the dark curtains and ward, but pride held him back, for would have passed on into the room Leopold was a proud man, and to have had not the quick gesture brought her his love thrown in his face was to re- arm into contact with the buttons and ceive an icy douche with the blood at gold braid on a man's breast.

Instantly she realized that some one was hiding there, some one dressed in days changed the hubits of a lifetime. a military coat, and her first impulse Pride, reserve, self control, the wish was for flight, anything to escape unnot only to appear but to be a man recognized. But on second thoughts

Whoever it was had in all probabiliplaced on a pedestal by his subjects- ty hidden himself for the purpose of all these he had thrown away for spying and was already aware that

Miss Mowbray had rushed into the He was too just a man not to admit house weeping after a tete-a-tete with that if one of his royal cousins of the emperor in the garden. Perhaps he younger branches had contemplated had even caught a word or two of her such folly as this he would have done sobbing ejaculation. No; she must not his best to nip that folly while it was run away and leave the outcome of in bud. "He jests at scars who never this affair to chance. She must see felt a wound," and until Leopold had with whom she had to deal that she learned by his own unlooked for ex- might know what was best to do.

She had taken a step into the room, men will do for love while the sweet but quick as light she turned, pulled away the screen of curtains and faced

It was a trying moment for him, and the girl's look stripped him of all his now bent on acting would but a month light audacity. She had come to the window by a different path from the ence, even force perhaps, brought to one he had watched; therefore she had bear in restraining him. Leopold saw taken him unawares before he had the change in himself, was startled time to escape, as he had planned. He and shamed by it. Nevertheless he was caught fairly and must save himwould have persevered, trampling self as best he could without prepara-

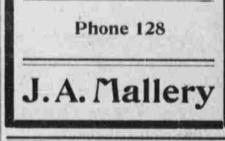
If her reproach forestalled his excuse he was lost. He must step into She had accused him of insulting the breach at whatever risk. There her, not stopping to consider that even was no time to weigh words. He must

plaint not only to his ministers, but to "I see what you think of me," he his people, for he was expected to said. "I see you think I was watching marry a girl of royal blood that the you. I swear I wasn't, though I knew country might have an heir. If Helen you were in the garden with-the em-Mowbray had accepted the position he peror. Wait-you must listen. You



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your wife. But you're not the chamoia show you to my subjects as their emhunter; you are the man I love, yet press, but instead I can offer only you are the emperor. Being the emwhat men of royal blood for hundreds peror, had you talked of a hopeless of years have offered to women whom love and a promise not to forget, havthey honored as well as loved. You ing nothing else to give me because of must have heard even in England of your high destiny and my humbler. what is called a morganatic marriage. one, I could still have been happy. It is that I offer you." Yet you speak of more than that. You With a cry of pain-the cruel pain of speak of something I can't understand. wounded, disappointed love-the prin-

stand."

pletion.

sight of God."

cess tore her hand from his. It seems to me that what a royal man offers the woman he loves should be "Never?" she exclaimed. "It's an inall or nothing." sult."

"I do offer you all." said Leopold, "all myself, my life, the heart and soul of me-all that's my own to give. The rest-belongs to Rhaetla." "Then what do you mean by"-

"Don't you understand, my sweet, that I've asked you to be my wife? What can a man ask more of a woman ?"

"Your wife, but not the empress. How can the two be apart?" He tried to take her once more in his arms, but when he saw that she would not have it so he held his love in check and waited. He was sure that he would not need to wait long, for not only had he laid his love at her feet, but had pledged himself to a tremendous sacrifice on love's altar.

The step which in a moment of passion he had now resolved to take would create dissension among his people, allenate one who had been his second father, rouse England, America and Germany to anger because of the princess whose name rumor had already coupled with his and raise in every direction a storm of disapproval. When this girl whom he loved realised the immensity of the concession he was making because of his reverent love for her she would give her life to him now and forever.

Tenderly he took her hand and lifted it to his lips. Then when she did not draw it away, because he was to have his chance of explanation, he held it between both his own as he talked on. "Dearest one," he said, "when I first knew I loved you-loved you as I didn't dream I could love a womanfor your sake and my own, I would have avoided meeting you too often. This I tell you frankly. I didn't see how in honor such a love could end except in despair for me and sorrow even for you if you should come to care. Had you and Lady Mowbray stayed on at the hotel in Kronburg I think I

had no existence." "Great heaven, that you should speak my heart would hold me free? My soul would be bound to you forever."

"So you may believe now. But the knowledge that you could change would be death to me-a death to die daily. Yes, I tell you again, it was an insult to offer a lot so miserable, so contemptible, to a woman you profess to love. How could you do it? If only you had never spoken the hateful words-if only you had left me the could have held to my resolve. But when Baroness von Lyndal suggested ideal I had of you-noble, glorious, above the whole world of men! But, your coming here my heart leaped up. after all, you are selfish, cruel. If you I said in my mind: 'At least I shall had said, 'I love you, yet we must have the joy of seeing her every day for a time without doing anything to part, for duty stands between us,' I darken her future. Afterward, when could- But, no; I can never tell you she has gone out of my life, I shall now what I could have answered if have that radiance to remember. And you had said that instead of breaking

so no harm will be done in the end. | my heart."

except that I shall have to pay by raf. | Under the fire of her reproach he

ken her heart by making another mar- sent to this room to fetch you. For riage.

Not only would it be difficult in these days to find a princess willing to tolerate such a rival, but it would have you-with him. I saw from your manbeen impossible for him to desecrate ner that-he had made you suffer. I the bond between himself and the one adored woman.

This being the case, with Helen Mowbray as his morganatic wife, there could be no direct heir to the throne. At his death the son of his uncle, the Archduke Joseph, would succeed, and during his life the popularity which was dear to him would be hopelessly forfeited. Rhaetia would never forgive him for selfishly preferring his own private happiness to the too well," said Virginia brokenly. The good of the nation. beautiful fairy palace of happiness that

He could fancy how old Iron Heart von Breitstein would present this point ought to have seen its triumphant com- of view to him with fierce eloquence, temples throbbing like the ticking of a watch, eyes netted with bloodshot veins. But, on the other hand, he could picture himself standing calmly to face the storm, steadfast in his own

know, that you would be my wife in indomitable will, happy with love to the sight of all men as well as in the uphold him.

But now the will which had borne "Your wife, you call it!" The prin- him through life in a triumphal march cess gave a harsh little laugh which had been powerless against that of hurt as tears could not hurt. "You this young girl. She would have none seem to have strange ideas of that of him. A woman whose face was her word, which has always been sacred fortune, whose place in life was hardto me. A morganatic marriage! That | iy as high as the first step of a throne, is a mere pretense, a hypocrisy. I had refused-an emperor!

would be 'your wife,' you say. I would Hardly could Leopold believe the give you all my love, all my life. You thing that had happened to him. He in return would give me-your left had spoken of doubting that he had hand. And you know well that in a won her love, and he had doubted. country which tolerates such a one But he had allowed himself to hope, sided travesty of marriage the laws because he had confidence in his star would hold you free to marry another and because perhaps it had scarcely woman-a royal woman, whom you been known in the annals of history could make an empress-as free as if I that an emperor's suit should be repulsed.

Besides, he had loved the girl so passo!" he broke out. "What if the law sionately that it seemed she could not did hold me free? Can you dream-do remain cold. And he hoped still that you put me so low as to dream-that when she had passed a long night in reflection, in thinking over the situation, perhaps taking counsel with that comparatively commonplace yet practical little lady, her mother, she might be ready to change her mind.

For the first few moments after the stinging rebuff he had endured Leopold felt that if she did it would be her turn to suffer, for he could never humble himself to implore for the second time. But as he stood in the soft stillness of the night, gazing toward the lights of the house, thoughts of Virginia-her youth, her sweetness, her beauty dimmed with grief-overwhelmed him. Could he have reached her he would have fallen on his knees and

kissed her gown. By and by a vast tenderness breathed its calm over the thwarted passion In his breast, and plans to win her you do it."-Exchange.

your sake, how could I go back and

say you had disappeared-together? I looked out into the garden and saw was half mad with rage, guessing-

guessing something which one word you let drop as you came in told me had happened. He is my sovereign. but-he has insulted you. Let me be your knight, as in days of old. Let me defend you, for I love you. I walted here to tell you this as you came, so that if you would we might announce an engagement"-

If Virginia's eyes had been daggers he would have fallen at her feet pierced to the heart. For one long second

she looked at him without speaking. her face eloquent. Then she went by him with the proud bearing of a queen. Egon was stricken dumb. Dully he watched her move across the room to a door which led into a corridor. He heard the whisper of her satin dress and saw the changing lights and shad-

ows on its creamy folds under the crystal chandeliers; he saw the white reflection, like a spirit, mirrored deep under the polished surface of the floor. Never had she been more beautiful. but she was beautiful in his eyes no longer. He had hurt her pride, but she had stabbed his vanity, and to wound Egon von Breitstein's vanity was to strike at his life. He hated the girl. hated her so sharply that his nerves ached with the intensity of his hatred, and the only relief he could have

would be through reprisal. He had not been able to deceive her. She knew that he had been spying. and it was fortunate for his future, he realized already, that she had broken with the emperor. He must do all he could, and do it quickly, to prevent a reconciliation lest she should work him injury.

As for his hastily stammered proposal, it was a good thing that the girl had not taken him at his word. for the chancellor had not given him permission to speak, and if she had accepted him he might have had to wriggle out of his engagement. Still,

he could not forgive her scorn of him. "Lorenz shall help me to pay her for this"" he said furiously to himself, too angry to mourn over lost hopes, lost opportunities. "He will know how to punish her. And between us she shall suffer."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

scamp, are you?" said old Roxley. "Well, I propose to cure you of that." "You can't," retorted the willful young girl. "I'm determined to marry him." "That's it exactly. I propose to let JAMES GRAHAM

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